

Ting © Xen. 5

Once upon a time in America, neighborhoods existed that were perfect for raising kids. I was fortunate enough to live in one of them; a little town named River Oaks, TX. Kids were everywhere; the streets and schools were safe. People watched over them without worry for their safety. We observed mainly to steer them out of trouble, as mischievous children are wont to get into. In groups, what one kid does not think of another will, which can spell trouble: kids will be kids. One Saturday morning, I answered a knock at the door to find standing before me a little girl of about 7–8 with a handful of flowers. She lived down the street. ‘Hello mister, my name is Ting, would you like to buy my flowers?’ she said. Well, now, they look very nice – how much? “A dime each or three for a quarter,” said Ting. I am thinking, this kid is one shrewd businesswoman and the next President of corporate America when she grows up. Some hustle. ‘Ok, Ting, I would like a dollars worth...’ I could hear the wheels of commerce turning in her head crunching profit–loss margins and other business; more interesting were her facial expressions coinciding with all that; yep, next CEO somewhere, for sure, this kid has great potential. She finally figures the tally and counts out twelve flowers. I give her a buck–done deal. Then she pulled out one blossom and handed it to me. I asked, ‘What’s this?’ She said, ‘Just for you, mister’ then happily turned and went on her way. Jr. Achievement could learn a lesson or two from this kid! Next Saturday, Ting is again at the door with her flowers. This time I changed the plan. After the same sales pitch of ten cents each or three for a quarter, I asked, ‘how much for the whole bundle?’ Her eyes lit up and the little wheels set into motion with an added bonus of getting off work early by clinching this single sale. Ting said, ‘three dollars.’ Okay, I will be right back and went for change. I had no singles, only a Yankee–five spot. Returning to the door I asked her for the bundle. She gave me all but one flower. I looked at them then said, ‘Well.... I don’t think they are worth three dollars’...followed by a pregnant pause for effect.’ Ting began shifting nervously. I let her stew a few moments then said, ‘this bundle is worth far more; so, I will pay five dollars instead. Deal?’ The surprise caught her off guard for a moment before she stuttered ‘Deal! Deal!’ I handed her the money; then she handed me the single flower reserved, “Just for you, mister.’ Why thank you Ting and returned her kindness with a peck on the noggin. Then off she skipped; five bucks and the day off to spend it! This was once upon a time in America, before political correctness befouled it, where pecks on the cheek or noggin and a gentle pat on the paw–paw were apropos and respectable encouragements for kids – especially for little girls; because little girls are special, but sadly they all grow up and move away. Now, however, I think expressing such encouragement towards a child is against some law to do; *maybe that is why kids in America are having so many problems these days*. I do not know where she got her bouquets but they were nice and worth the money. All summer long we played the game much the same custom each visit except for once. On that call, she decided to cut corners; pursuing straight to the chase Ting asked for five dollars straightaway. Maybe she was in a hurry that day. I gave it to her; she did not withhold the single flower and I withheld her peck on the noggin. Ting was visibly disappointed at the outcome. Next week, back to normal etiquette, she got her smooch and I got my ‘Just for you, mister’ flower. She learned that cutting corners is bad for business and for getting smooches. Near summer’s end, Ting did not show up anymore. Concerned, I missed her for a while then resigned that this too shall pass and life goes on. Then one day I came home from work to find a paper bag on the porch held down by a rock. In it was a single flower and hand written note in a child’s penmanship, “Just for you Mister, Ting.” Puzzled, I asked a neighbor lady, who was also the neighborhood busy–body, about Ting. ‘Oh, that was a military family and they moved away,’ she said. I did not even have a chance to say goodbye; I never forgot Ting. In ways of the heart, we all touch each other indelibly. I kept the last flower, pressed, and dried, preserving it. The withered and dried keepsake reminds me of her; though the blossoms she planted in my heart remain fresh and everlasting. Perhaps that is why she did not say goodbye – goodbyes are painful; but, instead, left me a *forget-me-not* that simply said, ‘Just for you, Mister’ of a single flower planted in my soul *forevermore*.